



MARCH 1, 2024

Healthy Eating Tips

AT A GLANCE

Most people in the United States need to increase their intake of dietary fiber, calcium, vitamin D, and potassium. Healthy eating emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and protein. This page includes a few quick and easy tips on how to make healthy dietary choices.



Background

Good nutrition is about consistently choosing healthy foods and beverages. Healthy eating patterns can include foods and beverages that reflect preferences, cultural traditions, and [budgetary considerations](#).

Healthy eating emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and protein. Dairy recommendations include low-fat or fat-free milk, lactose-free milk, and fortified soy beverages. Other plant-based beverages do not have the same nutritional properties as animal's milk and soy beverages. Protein recommendations include seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans, peas, and lentils), soy products, nuts, and seeds.

Most people in the United States need to eat more foods with dietary fiber, calcium, vitamin D, and potassium, according to the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) [PDF](#). At the same time, we need to consume less added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium. Here are some ways to get started.

Bump up fiber

Fiber helps maintain digestive health and helps us feel fuller longer. Fiber also helps control blood sugar and lowers cholesterol levels. Fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds are [good sources of fiber](#).

To bump up fiber, try this:

- Slice raw vegetables for quick snacks.
- Start your day with a whole-grain cereal, like oatmeal.
- Foods made with bulgur or quinoa are also high in fiber.
- Top your cereal with berries, pumpkin seeds, or almonds.
- A half-cup of beans or lentils on a salad can add texture and flavor.
- Enjoy fresh fruit with a meal or as dessert.

Increase calcium and vitamin D

Calcium and vitamin D work together to promote optimal bone health. Our bodies can make vitamin D from sunshine. However, some people may have a hard time producing enough vitamin D. And too much sun exposure can increase the risk of skin cancer.

Foods and beverages are often fortified with this essential nutrient. See food [sources of calcium](#) and [vitamin D](#).

To increase calcium and vitamin D intake, try this:

- Drink a fortified dairy beverage with your meals.

- Add sardines to your lunch once a week.
 - Canned salmon is another great option.
 - Sardines and salmon with bones have more calcium than these products without bones.
- Cook with spinach, collard greens, bok choy, mushrooms, and taro root.
- Look for foods that are fortified with [calcium](#) and [vitamin D](#).
 - Fortified foods may include soy beverages, soy yogurt, orange juice, and some whole-grain cereals.
 - Just be sure they don't include added sugars!

Add more potassium

Potassium helps the kidneys, heart, muscles and, nerves function properly. Not getting enough potassium can increase blood pressure, deplete calcium in bones, and increase the risk of kidney stones.

People with chronic kidney disease and people taking certain medications may have too much potassium in their blood. But most people in the United States need to consume more potassium. See [food sources of potassium](#).

To add more potassium, try this:

- Try new [recipes](#) that use beets, lima beans, or Swiss chard.
- Try a variety of drinks high in potassium.
 - 100% prune, pomegranate, or orange juice.
 - Fat-free milk and low-fat kefir.
- Have a banana as a snack.

Limit added sugars

Too much added sugar in your diet can contribute to weight gain, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. [Added sugars](#) are sugars and syrups that are added to foods and [drinks](#) when they are processed or prepared.

Added sugars have many names, including cane juice, corn syrup, dextrose, and fructose. Table sugar, maple syrup, and honey are also considered added sugars. Sugary drinks are a [common source of added sugars](#) [PDF](#).

To limit added sugars, try this:

- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.
 - Add berries or slices of lime, lemon, or cucumber for more flavor.
- Add fruit to your cereal or yogurt for sweetness.
- Don't stock up on sugary drinks and snacks.
 - Instead, drink water and snack on fruit and vegetable slices.
- At coffee shops, skip the flavored syrups and whipped cream.
 - Add a low-fat or unsweetened, fortified soy beverage instead.
 - Or get back to basics with black coffee.
- Read [nutrition labels](#).
 - Choose foods with no or lower amounts of added sugars.



Add slices of lime or lemon to you water for more flavor.

Replace saturated fats

Replacing saturated fat with healthier unsaturated fats can help protect your heart. Common sources of saturated fat include fatty meats, full-fat milk and cheese, butter, and cream cheese.

We need some dietary fat to give us energy, develop healthy cells, and help absorb some vitamins and minerals. But **unsaturated fat is better for us than saturated fat**. See [common sources of saturated and unsaturated fat](#) [PDF](#) [↗](#).

To replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats, try this:

- Replace whole milk in a smoothie with low-fat yogurt and an avocado.
- Sprinkle nuts or seeds on salads instead of cheese.
- Use beans or seafood instead of processed or high-fat meats as a source of protein.
- Cook with oil instead of butter or margarine.
 - Try canola, olive, peanut, safflower, soybean, or sunflower oil.
- Replace full-fat milk and cheese with low-fat or fat-free versions.



Fruits like avocado can provide healthy unsaturated fat in your diet.

Cut back on sodium

Eating too much sodium can raise your risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. More than 70% of the sodium Americans consume comes from packaged and prepared foods. While sodium has many forms, 90% of the sodium we consume is from salt. See the [top sources of sodium](#) [PDF](#) [↗](#).

To cut back on sodium, try this:

- Find alternatives to salt to add flavor to your meals.
 - A squeeze of lemon juice.
 - A dash of no-salt spice blends.
 - Fresh herbs.
- Eat high-sodium processed and prepackaged food less frequently.
 - [Common foods](#) with high sodium include breads, pizza, and deli meats.
- Read the [Nutrition Facts label](#) to find foods low in sodium.

- Buy unprocessed food to prepare at home without salt.
 - Good options include fresh or frozen vegetables.

Aim for a variety of colors

A good practice is to aim for a variety of colors on your plate. Fruits and vegetables like oranges, tomatoes, and dark, leafy greens—and even fresh herbs—are loaded with vitamins, fiber, and minerals.

To get a variety of healthy foods, try this:

- Sprinkle fresh herbs over a salad or whole-wheat pasta.
- Make a red sauce with fresh tomatoes, fresh herbs, and spices.
 - Or start with canned tomatoes with no salt added.
- Add diced vegetables to stews and omelets to boost color and nutrients.
 - Peppers, broccoli, and onions are great options.
- Top low-fat, unsweetened yogurt with your favorite fruit.



Adding diced peppers and herbs to a dish boosts color and nutrients.

More information

General

- [Nutrition in Daily Life](#) features
- [Eat Healthy Foods](#)
- [Tips to Help Your Picky Eater](#)
- Benefits of Healthy Eating
 - [Adults](#)
 - [Children](#)
- [Build a Healthy Eating Routine](#) PDF [↗](#)
- [Shop Simple with My Plate](#) [↗](#)
- [MyPlate Recipes](#) [↗](#)


Added Sugars

- [Rethink Your Drink](#)
- [Be Smart About Sugar](#)
- [Cut Down on Added Sugars](#) PDF [↗](#)

Saturated Fat

- [Cut Down on Saturated Fat](#) PDF [↗](#)

Sodium

- [Tips for Reducing Sodium Intake](#)
- [Cut Down on Sodium](#) PDF 

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
[National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion \(NCCDPHP\)](#)